

# John Dos Passos's Early War Novels and the Question of Manliness

MISUGI Keiko

John Dos Passos の初期戦争小説と男らしさの問題

三 杉 圭 子

## 要 旨

John Dos Passos (1896-1970) の初期戦争小説、*One Man's Initiation—1917* (1920) と *Three Soldiers* (1921) は作家の第一次世界大戦下の実体験をもとにしている。前者は戦争の暴虐を主人公の視点に寄り添って主観的に描き、後者は軍隊における個人の抑圧を複数の視点から表現し、主人公達の敗北の生き様には「男らしさ」が欠如しているという批判を浴びた。しかし、Dos Passos は「男らしさ」の問題について決して無関心ではなかった。彼は複雑な家庭環境から、精力的な父親にある種の畏怖の念を抱きつつ、自らの男性性に不安を覚えていたと考えられる。折しも第一次世界大戦は旧来の価値観に暴力的な終焉をもたらし、「男らしさ」の理想は再編成を迫られていた。そして Dos Passos は作家を志すとともに、亡き父の期待に応えんとして誇り高き男になることを目指した。この二重の野心において、彼は20世紀のモダンな男性小説家というものを再定義せざるを得なかったのである。

Dos Passos は、小説家という生業は一人前の男が誇るに足る立派な仕事であると主張した。彼が目指したのは、科学者のそれに匹敵する客観的観察力と表現力を備えた「歴史の建築家」としての小説家であった。そしてその精力的な仕事において、理想的な芸術作品は、対象への関与と超然の弁証法的統合から産まれると彼は述べている。*Initiation* と *Soldiers* における芸術家主人公達には、Dos Passos が目指す理想の創作の可能性が読みとれる。好奇心に突き動かされる *Initiation* の Martin Howe は、*Soldiers* において、自由を希求する活動の重要さに覚醒しつつも身を投げ得ぬ John Andrews へとつながる。彼らの野心は未然に終わるが、そうした関与と超然の狭間にこそ、成年男子の証となるべき優れた作品は産まれ得るのである。客観的視点と表現の達成を見るには、より成熟した後の作品群を待たねばならないが、Dos Passos の初期戦争小説には、新しい時代の小説家としての独自の「男らしさ」への模索がつづられている。

**キーワード：**ドス・パソス、ジェンダー、男らしさ、第一次世界大戦、戦争小説

## Abstract

John Dos Passos's early war novels, *One Man's Initiation—1917* (1920) and *Three Soldiers* (1921) were written under the direct influence of WWI, which finalized the transition of American society from the Victorian to the modern era. The young Dos Passos aspired to a creative career and to manly vigor to gratify his late father's expectations. This twofold ambition led him to redefine what it meant to be a modern American male novelist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *Initiation* and *Soldiers*, Dos Passos depicts male characters whose masculinity failed them and whose individual male identity was either impaired or lacking entirely in the contexts of modern war and bureaucratic organization. While such objective description of the war invited criticism of cowardice, Dos Passos aimed at a different discourse of virility on a different platform. What he sought was the stature of an ideal novelist, a manly writer, an "architect of history," whose vigorous work combines observance and expression that can be distinguished for its objectivity, and comparable to that of a scientist. As the curiosity and ambitions of Martin Howe grow into John Andrews's unfinished "The Body and Soul of John Brown," Dos Passos depicts the young composer groping through the dialectic evolution between being "engaged and disengaged" toward a superior work of art. Though the writer's quest for an ideal work of art which "no man should be ashamed of" continued into his more mature works, in his early war novels, Dos Passos shows a youthful yet deliberate pursuit of manliness in his own terms as a novelist.

**Key words:** Dos Passos, gender, manliness, World War I, war novel

## I. John Dos Passos and World War I

John Dos Passos (1896–1970) launched his career as a novelist with *One Man's Initiation*—1917 published in 1920 and won critical acclaim with *Three Soldiers* in 1921. Both novels were based on his experiences during World War I as a volunteer ambulance driver and later as a U. S. Army soldier.<sup>1</sup> After graduating from Harvard, Dos Passos joined Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service in 1917 and then the Red Cross, to witness the war front firsthand. He was put to work transporting sick and injured soldiers in France and Italy. In 1918, after being dismissed by the Red Cross due to his anti-governmental correspondence, he joined the U.S. Army and after a month's waiting within the States, sailed to post-armistice France and was discharged the following summer. His novel, *Initiation*, representing the writer's experience in a subjective manner in the figure of Martin Howe, the protagonist who reflects the writer's own sentiments and experiences, did not draw much critical attention. However, *Soldiers*, which realistically dramatizes the defeat of individual soldiers from multiple points of view, stirred up controversy due to its unflattering depiction of soldiers. This won the writer instant fame and notoriety. On the one hand, *Soldiers* was praised as "the first complete and competent novel of the American Army" to depict it as "a symbol of all the systems by which men attempt to crush their fellows and to add to the already unbearable agony of life" (Bishop 33). On the other hand, critics charged Dos Passos with cowardice, and said his depiction was an insult to the Army. On Oct 2, 1921, in the *New York Times*, Coningsby Dawson attacked the lack of virility of the soldiers rendered in the novel. He denounced *Soldiers* as a failure because of "its unmanly intemperance" and accused a character of having lost the "clean pride of his manhood through dissipation." In a similar vein, Harold Norman Denny dismissed the book as "yellow," written by a non-combatant amateur who is unqualified to write about war.

It is true that these novels do not commend soldiers' heroism, valor, and patriotism, but instead reveal their fear and anxiety. However, this is slim evidence that Dos Passos was indifferent to the idea of manliness.<sup>2</sup> Biographers Townsend Ludington and Virginia Spencer Carr studied the author's complicated upbringing and have uncovered several forces that shaped the writer's male identity. He was born an illegitimate child of John Randolph Dos Passos, a prominent lawyer in New York, and Lucy Addison Sprigg Madison. He was raised by Lucy and other elderly women. A shy boy from a household without an example of masculinity, he distanced himself from competitive boys in prep school and was often assigned a female role in school plays. In 1910, John R. officially married Lucy, and came to show greater concern for his son's education and future. Dos Passos's relationship with his father developed into an intimate and influential one until John R's sudden death in 1917. As Kenzaburo Ohashi points out, it is plausible to assume that Dos

Passos felt “worshipping longing” and at the same was held “in awe and a kind of oppression” in his relationship to his father [translation mine](5).<sup>3</sup> In front of a vigorous self-made man of wealth and high social standing, the young Dos Passos must have wished to prove his own manhood to win his father’s approval. After the death of John R. whose fatherly concern had kept the son away from the war front, Dos Passos eagerly joined the volunteer ambulance service. At that time, he was an aspiring writer with an essay, “Against American Literature,” in *The New Republic* and a manuscript for a co-authored book of poems, *Eight Harvard Poets*. Dos Passos was a young artist anxious to experience the war, though his political outlook was more of a pacifist. He sailed for France with ambitions for his future: he would see war and prove his manliness.

Dos Passos arrived in France in June 1917 and began collaborating on a writing project with his Harvard friend Robert Hillyer in August. This would develop into the first draft of *Initiation* the following summer. In 1918 he joined the Army, and the experience germinated a new novel, *Soldiers*, which he worked on in earnest after being discharged in the years immediately following the war. These novels were conceived during and shaped by the war. If war is a touchstone for manhood, what does it mean that the young writer, who aspired to a respectable male identity, invited controversy over lack of honorable virility? This essay examines representations of manliness and masculinity in Dos Passos’s early war novels. Exploring the writer’s observation of WWI and the dominant gender ideology of the time, the paper examines how Dos Passos searched for a new mode of manliness in his writing.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Manliness and the Novelist

### II-1. The Idea of Manliness in the turn-of-the-century America

To investigate ‘manliness’ in Dos Passos’s early war novels, we must clarify the term and see how it plays out against ideas of the writer’s trade in Dos Passos’s time. When Dos Passos was born at the end of the 19th century, the dominant American male identity, as expressed in contemporary discourse, was of a virile man in command of his surroundings. In 19th century America, the development of industrial capitalist economy brought about drastic changes in societal norms, individual lives, and in notions of gender. A growing market economy encouraged men to be active and agile to make the most of opportunities, and its unpredictable fluidity called for “self-mastery and restraint” for men to establish themselves (Bederman 12). Middle-class men were expected to succeed, but at the same time, to control themselves according to Christian morality.<sup>5</sup> The exemplary male of the 19th century was summarized in terms such as “the Masculine Achiever” and “the Christian Gentleman” (Rotundo 36).<sup>6</sup> Peter Filene explains a quintessential middle-class Victorian male as follows:

Ideally, a man was self-reliant, strong, resolute, courageous, honest—traits that people summed up simply as character. At home he governed absolutely but justly, chivalrous toward his wife and firm toward his children, defending them against all adversity. He

provided a benevolent patriarchy. Outside the home, he worked to earn the income that would feed, clothe, and shelter his family in happy comfort. As breadwinner he must struggle against his fellow men and natural forces, but with enough determination he would succeed. (70)

This ideal was challenged by a changing economy and society at the end of the 19th century. Consecutive depressions and losses of small businesses circumscribed workingmen's opportunities for economic advancement, and undermined the older value of 'manly self-restraint.' Historians argue that men at the turn of the century faced a new set of codes on masculinity, stressing physical strength, vigor, aggressiveness, and male sexuality more than self-restraint and civility (Bederman 17-19, Rotundo 40-42). Arnold Rotundo depicts this new model as the "Masculine Primitive" (36, 40). It is no accident that in 1899, a year after the Spanish-American War, Theodore Roosevelt addressed a group of gentlemen at a Republican club in Chicago. He urged them to lead "the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife" (1). He continued:

The timid man, the lazy man, the man who distrusts his country, the over-civilized man, who has lost the great fighting, masterful virtues, the ignorant man, and the man of dull mind, whose soul is incapable of feeling the mighty lift that thrills "stern men with empires in their brains" [...]. (7-8)

And he concluded:

Let us therefore boldly face the life of strife, resolute to do our duty well and manfully; resolute to uphold righteousness by deed and by word; resolute to be both honest and brave, to serve high ideals, yet to use practical methods. Above all, let us shrink from no strife, moral or physical, within or without the nation, provided we are certain that the strife is justified, for it is only through strife, through hard and dangerous endeavor, that we shall ultimately win the goal of true national greatness. (20-21)

Delivered eloquently in Roosevelt's personal and compelling style, the speech conveys the spirit of his times. Many men patronized YMCA and sent their sons to the Boy Scouts to cultivate fraternity, altruism, and self-discipline.

War broke out in Europe in 1914 and the U.S. joined the fighting in 1917. Hundreds of thousands of young American men sailed for Europe. Rooseveltian discourse was pervasive. Though he regarded the war as "capitalist debacle" and was disappointed with President Wilson's decision to enter the war (Landsberg 50), Dos Passos nevertheless was enthusiastic about the opportunity. His impatience to see the war was manifest in his letter to a friend, dated Aug. 26, 1916: "I am dying to get to Belgium [as a volunteer ambulance serviceman] to exhaust surplus energy" (*Correspondence* 24). Ten months later, he wrote, "It's fortunate I'm going to France as I'll be able to work off my incendiary ideas" (*Correspondence* 47). Once arriving on the scene, he referred to his "curious hankering after danger":

When one shell comes I want another, nearer, nearer, I constantly feel the need of the

drunken excitement of a good bombardment—I want to throw the dice at every turn with the old roisterer Death [...] and all through it I feel more alive than ever before—I have never lived yet. (“Introduction, 1968” to *Initiation* 22)

He also wrote that he had “learned to live in the world and stand it” (Carr 135), and others testified to his “admirable coolness under fire” that “Dos was completely fearless” (Carr 136).

If the young Dos Passos went to war with enthusiasm for the experience, he was gratified in development of his hardy attitude toward life. But strengthening his survival skills was not his goal. Instead, he had come to write. In his diary on Aug. 26, 1917, he exclaims: “But gosh, I want to be able to express, later—all of this—all the tragedy and hideous excitement of it. I have seen so very little. I must experience more of it, & more—” (*Fourteenth* 95). Throughout this passage we see his eagerness to record his raw experiences and observations in writing. But his remarks are not in complete agreement with the dominant rhetoric of manhood in the 19th century. It is not the valor he notices, but instead the distorted bodies and squalor amid the combat. His growing aversion to government propaganda helped form his poignant observation that “[o]rganization is death” (*Correspondence* 19). This eventually becomes the theme of his second novel, in which the army demolishes the individual lives of soldiers. Such notions were at odds with the prevailing rhetoric of patriotism, which had been closely related to ideas of masculinity during the war. This became problematic for Dos Passos: his observations of the war separated him from the code of manly vigorousness he coveted.

## II-2. The Problem of Being a Novelist

Some critics have argued that there has been dissonance between creative writers and manliness in America (Barrish 11, Bell 6, 22). Puritan tradition regards creative writing as unmasculine. Nathaniel Hawthorne famously imagined himself being sneered at by his austere ancestor as “the degenerated fellow” for being a “writer of story-books” (10). In his discussion of American realism, Michael Davit Bell maintains that early 20th century male writers struggled to prove “to one’s society and oneself that one was a ‘real’ man rather than an effeminate ‘artist’”(6). In prior years there has been a problematic assumption “that the ‘artist’ was by accepted definition not a ‘real’ man” (22). Male writers have been often compelled to prove their virility in the act of writing, which would have otherwise aligned them uncomfortably with femininity.

What does Bell’s postulation show us about the introduction Dos Passos wrote for the new edition of *Soldiers* in 1932? Though written eleven years after the original publication, the content helps explain what was on the writer’s mind when he was writing the novel. After recalling the time of his writing, Dos Passos moves on to discuss the problem of being a novelist in the machine age, in defense against imaginary accusations: “Well you’re a novelist. What of it? What are you doing for it? What excuse have you got for not being ashamed of yourself?” (867). For him, the problem is not the profession of novelist but the deterioration of the quality of books in the age of

mass production. He laments that “[w]e’re not men enough to run the machines we’ve made” (867), and it becomes a proof of manhood to have mastery over machines. He categorizes writers into two kinds, “the architect of history” and “daydream artist” (868). He defines the merits of the “architect of history” who works at “straight writing”:

The mind of a generation is its speech. A writer makes aspects of that speech enduring by putting them in print. He whittles at the words and phrases of today and makes of them forms to set the mind of tomorrow’s generation. That’s history. A writer who writes straight is the architect of history. (868)

He argues that a “straight” writer is “dominating the machine of production,” while a daydream artist is “merely feeding the machine, like a girl in a sausage factory shoving hunks of meat into the hopper” (868), only producing “the girlishromantic gush about self-expression” (867). He further writes, “[m]aking a living by selling daydreams, sensations, packages of mental itchingpowders, is all right, but I think few men feel it’s much of a life of a healthy adult” (867). On the other hand, the “straight” writer’s effort is “vigorous absorbing devastating hopeless work, work that no man need be ashamed of” (868). For Dos Passos, with his gendered phrasing, what is at stake is the work of novelist worthy of an adult manhood.

Writing in the early 1930’s, he has undoubtedly used the word “man” as a generic term, to mean a human being regardless of its gender. Nonetheless, the gendered diction he employs suggests anxiety about his own male identity. It calls attention to the reasons why he has to defend the work of a novelist so vehemently—as “vigorous” work of “men” in his language. His self-defensiveness exposes the same problem that Hawthorne and Howells faced: the social assumption that the trade of novelist is unmanly and effeminate. It seems that Dos Passos internalized the judgment so as to hold a certain sense of guilt for the trade. If so, the phrase “architect of history” indicates his acquiescence to the gendered assumption that differentiates fiction from history, or novelist from architect, associating the former with femininity and the latter with masculinity. Indeed, Dos Passos’s father wanted him to study architecture in Spain after his graduation from Harvard. But the son never saw his father after his departure for Spain, as the latter suddenly fell victim to illness in New York. Dos Passos’s wish to make himself into the “architect of history” seems to be formulated to offset gender anxiety before his father’s ghost.

However, such rhetorical penchant for virility does not necessarily make Dos Passos a disciple of Theodore Roosevelt. As Janet Galliagni Casey points out, Dos Passos names James Joyce as the archetype of “architect of history,” who appears more introvert than extrovert and more introspective than dynamic (46). If he had offered praise of Ernest Hemingway, we might better understand what he was aiming at. No other writer, however, could represent a more explicit antithesis of Roosevelt’s “strenuous life” than did Joyce. Such contradictions pose questions: what relationship with manliness Dos Passos sought in his novels? And how does his discourse in the novels compare with the Roosevelt-led discourse of masculinity at the end of the Victorian era?

### III. Representation of Manliness and Masculinity

#### III-1. *One Man's Initiation*—1917

*Initiation* and *Soldiers* depict the plight of men who try to live as individuals and are crushed under the atrocity of war and the tyranny of organization. These novels represent the ordeals and failures of manhood that soldiers encountered in the first modern war, where technological developments such as poison gas enabled anonymous mass annihilation. In this new reality, a highly bureaucratized military system presided over the conduct of war, nullifying the Victorian codes of the previous era.

Though the title of *Initiation* seems to predict the growth of the protagonist Martin Howe, the story does not focus on the war front. Howe goes to war with determination: “I want to do something some day, but first I must see. I want to be initiated in all the circles of hell” (44). He identifies himself as a seer rather than a doer, and his anticipated initiation does not lead him to any visible accomplishment. What he witnesses is far different from what Roosevelt called for. It is not heroism but the ennui of soldiers who play cards “to cheat their boredom and their misery” (30). He wishes to “flee from all this stupidity, from all this cant of governments, and this hideous reiteration of hatred,” and imagines himself “working in the fields, copying parchments in quaint letterings, drowsing his feverish desires to calm in the deep-throated passionate chanting of the endless offices of the Church” (27). He is precisely “the over-civilized man, who has lost the great fighting,” whom Roosevelt attacked. Howe’s fancy is nothing but escape from reality.

The most lingering image in the novel is a wounded soldier Howe sees at a restaurant in Paris. When enjoying himself “dreamily,” Howe is obstructed by a soldier at the next table:

He found himself staring in a face, a face that still had some of the chubbiness of boyhood. Between the pale-brown frightened eyes, where the nose should have been, was a triangular black patch that ended in some mechanical contrivance with shiny little black metal rods that took the place of the jaw. He could not take his eyes from the soldier’s eyes, that were like those of a hurt animal, full of meek dismay. (10)

He cannot keep the vision from his mind, as “[n]ow and then, he glanced, furtively, with shame, at the man at next table”; and even while pacing the town at nighttime, “he saw the brown hurt eyes of the soldier, and the triangular black patch where the nose should have been” (10). The defect of the nose, an obvious symbol of male genitalia, signifies castration and “a loss of masculine identity” (Graves 233). His compulsively repetitive glances at the defection and the accompanying sense of “shame” not only reveal his fear but also intimate his recognition what injury the violence of war might inflict upon the male body and psyche. Eventually, he sees the body of an emasculated soldier in a field hospital. In his recognition, male aspiration to Rooseveltian machismo in the war has led to its opposite.



### III-2. *Three Soldiers*

Compared to *Initiation*, *Soldiers* is endowed with more development in characterization, structure, and style, attesting to the growth of the writer. Dos Passos uses three characters to represent a more inclusive picture of American soldiers, encompassing diverse geographical and class backgrounds, along with different personalities and ambitions. The novel sees the army through the metaphor of “machine,” as the sections are entitled, “Making the Mould,” “The Metal Cools,” “Machines,” “Rust,” “The World Outside,” and “Under the Wheels.” The repeated images of “treadmill,” “slavery,” and “automaton” throughout the novel indicate how organization oppresses individuals and tramples on their lives. *Initiation* drew criticism over its lack of valiant masculinity, since each of its protagonists becomes a failure in the army and suffers disgrace.<sup>7</sup> Dan Fuselli is condemned to the lower position; Chris Chrisfield and John Andrews both become deserters, while the former loses mental balance, and the latter is arrested by the military police.

Fuselli is an optician from San Francisco, and aspires to social and material advancement in the army. He tries to win promotion regardless of appearance or honor, and is willing to fawn upon his superiors. In the highly bureaucratized army he works for, there is little chance for him to achieve social distinction on his own merit. When imagining how his girlfriend, Mabe, should be delighted to address him with the title of Corporal, Fuselli may seem to resemble a Victorian man striving for the well-being of his family. But for him, Mabe is replaceable, as he says to himself on a visit to a palace in France, “[s]ome day [...] he’d make a hell of a lot of money and live in a house like that with Mabe; no, with Yvonne [his French girlfriend], or with some other girl” (168). Fuselli identifies social and material success with sexual conquest. Moreover, he attempts to make use of his girlfriend to win favor from his superior, as he invites a sergeant to a dinner at Yvonne’s. As a consequence, he loses Yvonne, who leaves him for the sergeant. He loses both the girl and a chance at promotion; his desires for a heterosexual relationship and social advancement are both thwarted. At the end of the novel, Fuselli is infected with venereal disease, court-martialed for misconduct, and assigned permanently to the kitchen police. We also learn that Mabe was married to a Navy reservist at a magnificent ceremony. As Fuselli identifies sexual desire with material advancement, his confused conception carries him nowhere. While the self-restraint of Victorian manliness was replaced by the new mode of aggressiveness and male sexuality, Fuselli can neither realize his upward mobility nor satisfy his sexual urge. And his body is infected by venereal disease, symbolizing the contamination of his manhood.

Chrisfield is a farm boy from Indiana, ingenuous and simple but prone to violence. Having quit school at twelve, he welcomes war as an opportunity to vent his violent impulses. A stranger to self-restraint, he is far from a Victorian male ideal. He believes that he was unjustly humiliated by Sergeant Anderson. Chrisfield “felt powerless as an ox under the yoke. All he could do was work and strain and stand at attention, while that white-faced Anderson could lounge about as if he owned the earth and laugh importantly like that” (222). He develops a murderous impulse toward

Anderson.

He equates violence with sexual aggression. Noticing his muscles “taut and trembling,” he feels them as if “before when he was about to get into a fight or to make love to a girl” (204). There is also a moment when, seized with rage, he substitutes a sexual threat to a girl with “large breasts and flabby figure” for his attack on Anderson: he “look[s] at her greedily, feeling his furious irritation flame into one desire” (230), and thrusts a crumpled fifty-franc note “down between her breasts” (231). When he later dreams of struggling with Anderson, the sergeant “turned into a woman with huge flabby breasts” whom he crushes against himself (245). Deprived of any possibility of manliness in the power structure of the army, Chrisfield turns his aggressiveness toward Anderson as a desperate expression of his maleness. Moreover, there lurks a hint of homosexuality and misogyny in Chrisfield. He feels affectionate toward John Andrews, as he is soothed by Andrews’s voice when dismayed with unruly emotions (230). He is almost reverential to his well-educated friend, wishing to match his learning (231). On their reunion near the end of the novel, they find themselves deserters, and Chrisfield tells Andrews how he wished they could stay together (450). Chrisfield is plagued by a paranoia that somebody is aware of his culpability. He internalizes the oppressiveness of the organization, and is condemned with what Victorians regarded as the foremost “female” mental pathology. His maleness, which used to take a shape of violence against others, has turned into inescapable self-oppression.

Last, we would like to inquire how masculinity and manliness function or fail with Andrews. He is an aspiring composer originally from Virginia, who writes music reviews in New York after graduating from Harvard. Like Howe, he is another “over-civilized man,” who joined the army only because he was “so bored with himself,” as “[e]ver since his first year at college he seemed to have done nothing but think about himself, talk about himself” (111). During the war he indulges himself in escapist reveries. Growing weary of “slavery” and life on a “treadmill,” he wishes to sleep over the entire war in a poppy field, and gets injured in a leg, while watching frogs in puddles behind his squad. As he falls down, Andrews feels “triumphantly separated from [his platoon], as if he were in a window somewhere watching soldiers pass, or in a box of a theater watching some dreary monotonous play” (253). He further indulges himself by reading Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine* “as if the book were a drug in which he could drink deep forgetfulness of himself” (267). He wants to resume composing on a theme from Queen of Sheba. Andrews fantasizes Sheba’s sensuous seductions and feels her rhythm. But everything dissolves into unintelligible chaos, overwhelmed by the patriotic anthem: “It all muddled into fantastic gibberish—into sounds of horns and trombones and double basses blown off key while a piccolo shrilled the first bars of ‘The Star Spangled Banner’” (313). Averting patriotism and manly responsibilities, he cannot even devote himself to music, which should have been a source of his strength.

*Initiation* and *Soldiers* depict men who are emasculated under the assault of modern war, and who cannot achieve the 19th century ideal of masculinity in the bureaucratic organization of the

army. Though part of their unmasculine quality may be innate, it is evident that there is no chance for them to realize respectable manhood. In these novels, Dos Passos shows how war and organization can impair masculinity. Then, we wonder what has happened to the aspiration for virility Dos Passos described in his introduction to *Soldiers*. It is not clear whether it was abandoned, simply failed, or found some other way of manifestation.

#### IV. Possibility of New Manliness

After *Soldiers*, Dos Passos published the modernist *Manhattan Transfer*, in 1925. In this novel he represents the city of New York as its central figure through a cubistic technique.<sup>8</sup> In the succeeding *U.S.A.* Trilogy he systematizes his narrative technique to encompass modern American society in its entirety. When he wrote of ideal “straight writing,” he was halfway through the Trilogy, having just published *Nineteen Nineteen*, the last of his novels directly related to WWI. In *U.S.A.*, he incorporates four elements in his work: newspaper headings and lines from popular songs in “Newsreel,” autobiographical stream-of-consciousness writing in “Camera Eye,” biographies of famous Americans, and fictional narratives. With this mix, Dos Passos captures the speech of his generation, revealing himself to be an “architect of history” (Hurm 127, Lee 159).<sup>9</sup> Dos Passos accomplishes “straight writing,” which was “so dominating the machine of production,” that an adult male writer can stand proud. In other words, the Trilogy is a manly work—the sort the young Dos Passos was groping for as he worked on his early war novels. In the earlier works, we can identify his narrative techniques, such as popular songs and phonetic transcriptions of spoken words. His quest for virility in the figure of an ideal writer is recognizable in the characterization of the young artist-protagonists, who are the writer’s double. Though Howe and Andrews do not achieve their honorable adult manhood as soldiers, they represent the germination of ideal writers and artists.

We can see something of Dos Passos’s intention by looking at his 1967 speech “What Makes a Novelist.”<sup>10</sup> Here the aged writer discusses an ideal quality of novelist, as he recollects the impact of WWI and its aftermath on his young mind, and how he came to write *Soldiers*, *Manhattan Transfer*, and then his historical chronicle, *U.S.A.* Though he does not employ heavily-gendered diction in this speech, his identification of a novelist with a historian, hunter, or physician reveals his persistent attempt to de-feminize his trade as a novelist, as he had done with the term “architect of history.” We still hear the echoes of Hawthorne and Howells about male anxiety.

In this speech Dos Passos insists on objectivity as a necessary quality of ideal works of art. They must be “both engaged and disengaged” at the same time, aloof to “the obsessions of the hour” and yet inclusive of “the whole range of the human spirit” (32). “For the novelist,” he explains, “his work is an endless struggle between his passions and prejudices and his need to turn them to good purpose in the objective description of the life around him” (32). He gives a lucid description of a shrimp’s heart by William Harvey, a Renaissance English physician, as model

writing. Dos Passos believes that the writer's goal is "[t]o see clearly and to express clearly what he sees" (32), as any scientist does. He contends that "[t]o observe objectively a man has to retain something of childhood's naïve and ignorant state of mind" and compares such a "dispassionate observer" to a hunter who turns himself to "an eye and an ear and a gun," devoid of personal ambitions (32). Convinced of his ignorance and alert to wonders of the world around him, the hunter-novelist remains ever curious; as Dos Passos declares, "[c]uriosity is the key" (32). The hunter's curiosity is identified as "the quality most needed for survival far back in the history of the race" (32), as it reminds us of the third category of the ideal male at the turn of the century, the "Masculine Primitive," which "stressed the belief that all males—civilised or not—shared in the same primordial instincts for survival" (Rotundo 40).

If Dos Passos has been working on his own terms of manliness as a novelist, it is worth investigating his early war novels. Dos Passos recalls his experience at the war as a formative factor for himself as a novelist. His young artist-protagonists are endowed with the traits that enable them to grope for the ideal of masculine writer. Curiosity is a significant feature in Howe. He explains his motive to go to war as "it's only curiosity" (5), and we may also recall his resolution: "I want to do something some day, but first I must see. I want to be initiated in all the circles of hell." His mind is as pure as that of a child, as he feels on board a ship crossing the Atlantic: "[n]ow a leaf seems to have been turned and a new white page spread before him, clean and unwritten on" (4). He is an "American Adam" with *tabula rasa*, as Michael Clark points out (62), free from the past and unknown to the future, devoid of passions and prejudices. When a girl raves in patriotic discourse, Howe mutters, "'the issues were hardly . . . defined'" and questions government propaganda she rants, "I wonder if it's all true" (6). However, what his blank mind absorbs is never clear. The novel concludes itself, as another soldier laments his friends' doom, "'Everybody's dead. You're dead, aren't you?'" to which Howe answers, "No, I'm alive" (85). The ending seems to testify to Howe's strong will to live beyond despair, which may be a sign of his growth, but Howe remains ineffective and listless.

Unlike Howe, Andrews joins the army out of boredom, and when recognizing the entrapment of army life, he learns the importance of freedom and becomes a deserter. Howe's effort to compose music reflects Dos Passos's attempt to become a worthy novelist, though the writer barely manages to elude sentimental identification with the composer.

Andrews first must emerge out of self-absorption, but he also needs to keep himself balanced, which proves to be a difficult task. Growing weary of his slavish existence, he thinks of himself, "What a coward he had been [...] to submit," and, "He had not had the courage to move a muscle for his freedom" (266). He plunges into water to desert, but this recklessness does not earn him respect. When contradicting his friends' advice to return to the post while unnoticed, he shouts, "Being free's the only thing that matters" (438). But his voice is depicted as "shrill and excited, breaking occasionally like a half-grown boy's voice" (438). Desertion alone does not provide what

he needs.

Andrews seeks new ways to unleash his creative drive. When hospitalized for leg injury, he renews his ambition for music, but his longing for creation is only his private passion: “[i]f he could only express these thwarted lives, the miserable dullness of industrialized slaughter, it might have been almost worth while—for him; for the others, it would never be worth while” (325). Through his desertion and breakup with his girlfriend, Andrews discards the theme of Sheba and moves on to work on a new theme, “The Body and Soul of John Brown,” named after the renowned abolitionist (458). John Brown (1800-1859) was a martyr for his ideas and man of action, one who fought for the freedom of fellow human beings with resolution, and did not shrink from armed aggression. Roosevelt would have commended his valor if not his lawlessness. It signals a great leap for Andrews to be awakened to problems of communal humanity in the name of the activist. However, Andrews admits to himself that he cannot act in the footsteps of the great precursor:

[H]e kept asking himself, hadn’t he tried long ago to act, to make a gesture, however feeble, however forlorn, for other people’s freedom? Half by accident he has managed to free himself from the treadmill. Couldn’t he have helped others? If he only had his life to live over again. No; he had not lived up to the name of John Brown. (474)

He feels enmeshed in frustration. Nevertheless, it is this very tension that is essential to produce a work of art. One must be both “engaged and disengaged” at the same time, and the struggle can be matrix to a masterpiece. As he sways between “his passions and prejudices and his need to turn them to good purpose,” Andrews at least is able to appraise himself objectively. He frees himself from the treadmill and grows away from the self-indulgence in the romanticized world of Sheba. He values the impact of political action for social betterment. Through this evolution, Andrews feels his way toward a ground on which he can begin to create, with both passions and objectivity, a work of art which “no man should be ashamed of.”

However, Andrews’s attempt at new composition never materializes in any substantial way. He is arrested by the Military Police, and nobody hears his music; instead it is blown by wind and scattered on the floor. The sense of futility at the end may reflect Dos Passos’s recognition of his own inadequacy to deal with his material. *Soldiers* falls short of an accomplished novel with an uneven structure among the three protagonists and a vague creative vision. Dos Passos leaves Andrews at the end of the novel without any assurance. Nonetheless, Andrews grows out of daydreaming artist to take action through desertion, and yearns to apply his private passions for good public purposes. Likewise, Dos Passos must proceed toward his ideal art by way of dispassionate observations and new methodologies to express them. If we consider contemporary reviews of *Soldiers*, which attacked Dos Passos for lack of not only masculinity but also of patriotism, the writer’s aloofness to “the obsession of his time” becomes clear. In his description of the “unmanly” soldiers without moral intervention, Dos Passos detaches himself from the dominant discourse of the time to retain an objective view of the human situation in organizations.

But he does not accomplish objective representation in his early war novels. With Fuselli and Chrisfield the young writer manages to accumulate facts to construct an objective narrative, but with Andrews he loses his hold. The exploration must be carried on through the writing of *Manhattan Transfer* and then to *U.S.A.*, which marks the high point of the writer's career as "architect of history" and the stature of a manly novelist he has craved.

Dos Passos's early war novels were written under the influence of WWI, which finalized the transition of American society from the Victorian to the modern era. The change also transformed the discourse of American males. Manliness—in the sense of the Victorian "Masculine Achiever" and "Christian Gentleman"—no longer provided a viable ideal for men, and "Masculine Primitive" took on a new significance. The young Dos Passos aspired to a creative career and to manly vigor to gratify his late father's expectations. This twofold ambition led him to redefine what it meant to be a 20th century American male novelist. In *Initiation* and *Soldiers*, Dos Passos depicts male characters whose masculinity failed them and whose individual male identity was either impaired or lacking entirely in the contexts of modern war and bureaucratic organization. While such objective description of the war invited criticism of cowardice, Dos Passos was aiming at totally different discourse of virility on a different platform. What he sought was the stature of an ideal novelist, a manly writer, an "architect of history," whose vigorous work combines observance and expression that can be distinguished for its objectivity, and comparable to that of a scientist. As the curiosity and ambitions of Martin Howe grow into John Andrews's unfinished "The Body and Soul of John Brown," Dos Passos depicts the young composer groping through the dialectic evolution between being "engaged and disengaged" toward a superior work of art. Though the writer's quest for an ideal work of art which "no man should be ashamed of" continued into his more mature works, in his early war novels, Dos Passos shows a youthful yet deliberate pursuit of manliness in his own terms as a novelist.

## Notes

- 1 Dos Passos's *Nineteen Nineteen* (1932), the second novel in the *U.S.A.* Trilogy, also deals with WWI. However, published a decade after *Soldiers*, the novel brings the broader perspective and innovative representational style that Dos Passos developed later in his career.
- 2 For the terms "masculinity" and "manliness," see Gail Bederman (18-19) and *The Century Dictionary* she draws upon in her discussion of manhood in the turn-of-the-century America. While "'manliness' comprised all the worthy, moral attributes which the Victorian middle class admired in a man," "masculinity" referred to the quality of being "masculine," which denotes "any characteristics, good or bad, that all men had"(18). The difference, then, is that the latter was "devoid of moral or emotional meaning" (18).
- 3 John H. Wrenn also writes, "Young Dos Passos respected, admired, and stood somewhat in awe of his father" (30).
- 4 Masculinity in Dos Passos's early novels is discussed by Janet Galligani Casey in her analysis of the

ideology of feminine and the writer, and by Mark Graves in his discussion of the male bonding in WWI novels. Miguel Carrasqueira also discusses the issue in relation to aesthetic perception in his discussion of *Soldiers*.

- 5 Though situation may vary according to class, it must be noted that discussion here is focused on middle-class, which is most relevant to our understanding of Dos Passos and his milieu.
- 6 Arnold Rotundo borrows the terms from Charles Rosenberg (150).
- 7 The discussion owes much to Casey's observations, of how male characters see females and male-female relationships.
- 8 In his memoir, Dos Passos refers to cubism and how, through "simultaneity," he tried to capture New York in his novel, as he writes: "Fragmentation. Contrast. Montage. The result was *Manhattan Transfer*" ("What Makes a Novelist" 31). Accordingly, Lisa Nanney discusses the impact of cubism on Dos Passos's writings (131-35).
- 9 Alfred Kazin calls it "a machine prose for a machine world" (268).
- 10 He delivered the speech when receiving the Feltrinelli award from Galileo's Academy of Lynxes in Rome in 1967. The speech was published in 1968.

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